Nations Rise and Fall

Richard F. Ames (1936-2024)

History is littered with the broken and dusty remains of once-great empires that no longer exist. Can today's nations learn the lessons their predecessors ignored?

The Chinese nation is again on the march toward political and economic superpower status. The once great British Empire has crumbled, and the United Kingdom may not even survive "Brexit." For nearly 6,000 years, from ancient Babylon to our modern day, civilization has seen powerful nations fall and others rise—and one final, prophesied empire or superpower is soon to come.

Earlier this year, Gerald Weston, Editor in Chief of *Tomorrow's World* magazine, reminded readers that the United States is nearing the end of its time as the world's leading superpower:

> The United States is still the leading world power, but it will not remain so forever, as surprising as that may sound to many Americans. *No* empire has endured forever. We can imagine that the citizens of past civilizations also expected their governments to remain. The "impregnable" city of Babylon with its great empire fell in one night to the Medes and Persians. None of them saw it coming. The Persian Empire fell before the daring conquests of Alexander the Great and his Greco-Macedonian Empire, which later fell to the rising might of Rome. And as we know, Rome's power and dominance also came to an end. Many people around the world root for America's demise, but have little idea who will fill the vacuum or what will be the consequences ("Our Best Hope," *Tomorrow's World*, January-February 2019).

For more than 200 years, the United States has been a great power on the world scene. Yet in the years since the Soviet Union's fall and in the wake of the global war on terror, we have seen the U.S. declining while other world powers exert ever more political, economic, and military force.

We should not be surprised. The world-ruling empires of the past no longer exist. The great Babylonian Empire, for example, conquered many nations, including the

Kingdom of Judah. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote, “in addition to its enormous size it [Babylon] surpasses in splendour any city of the known world” (*Histories*, 1, 178).

What happened to Babylon? Its depravity led to God’s judgment. As we see increasing rejection of the God of the Bible take root around us, should we expect anything different for ourselves? The philosopher Georg Hegel famously observed, “What experience and history teach is this—that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it” (*The Philosophy of History*, 1857, p. 6).

What can we learn from the past? What does the Bible tell us about the future? The prophet Daniel foretold the rise and fall of vast empires, including the Roman Empire. What happened to that empire? It lasted for more than 500 years beyond the Roman Republic. Yet even that mighty empire saw its first incarnation dissolve in 476 AD.

Modern empires, too, have come and gone. In the 20th century, the German “Third Reich” extended its rule over much of Europe and North Africa. Adolf Hitler’s ambitions included the conquest of the Soviet Union, but he failed. Allied armies vanquished the Third Reich. The Soviet Union, or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, consisted of 15 republics spanning 11,000 miles from east to west. This superpower took great pride in its communist ideology. It fought for the hearts of nations and peoples all over the world—yet ultimately, it, too, failed.

The Fall of Nations Prophesied!

Who could have predicted the demise of such a great superpower? You might be surprised to learn that a small group of Christians, inspired to understand the truth revealed in the Bible, understood all along that Eastern Europe would eventually escape the grip of the Soviet Union. How did they know? Bible prophecy foretells the rise of another great superpower, called the “beast” in the book of Revelation. More than 65 years ago, the *Good News* magazine—published by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong—boldly proclaimed that East Germany would be rejoined to West Germany, and that Russia “will be forced to relinquish her control over Hungary, Czechoslovakia and parts of Austria” (“Will German Rearmament Stop Russia?,” *The Good News*, April 1952).

Shortly after Russia’s 1956 invasion of Hungary, when many “experts” believed that the “Iron Curtain” had fallen forever on Eastern Europe, *The Plain Truth*

magazine made this amazing statement: “The way is being prepared for a colossal third force in world politics—a European Federation of Nations more powerful than either Russia or the United States!… We have shown years in advance what would happen to Russia’s ill-fated Empire in Eastern Europe” (“Foretold 22 Years Ago!,” December 1956).

Even a hundred years ago, people still said that “the sun never sets on the British Empire.” Yet within a century, that vast empire crumbled. After a final burst of expansion right after World War II, a process of *decolonization* began, and by 1960 the British had given up the lands that today comprise India, Pakistan, Burma, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Ghana, Nigeria, and Somalia, as well as much of sub-Saharan Africa, the Palestine Mandate, parts of Egypt and Sudan, and Hong Kong. For a generation or two, Britain sought to recapture some measure of its former glory as a member of the European Union, but even that attempt faltered when it found itself tasked with “Brexit” after British voters repudiated their EU membership.

U.S. President Donald Trump has campaigned under the slogan “Make America Great Again.” Will he succeed, or will the U.S. face a decline similar to that of Great Britain, Greece, and Rome? You *can* know what nations or empires will rise and fall in the 21st century. Bible prophecy reveals the future of the Western nations, *if you know the key* to finding the modern descendants of ancient biblical nations.

Remember or Repeat?

The words of renowned philosopher George Santayana remind us, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (*The Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense*, 1905, p. 103). Will we in the Western world learn the lessons of history? Or will we follow the pattern of all great kingdoms and empires that have come and gone before us?

King Belshazzar of Babylon was one great ruler who should have learned the lessons of history. Yet he insisted on his own godless way of life and led others into debauchery. His empire paid the penalty. That profound lesson is recorded in the pages of history—and in the pages of your Bible. The prophet Daniel was in the city of Babylon the night the Persian army conquered it. Through Daniel, God told Belshazzar what was going to happen to him and his empire. This amazing sequence of events is recorded in chapter 5 of the book of Daniel. King Belshazzar prepared a feast—a great party—for his nobles. They drank wine out of golden vessels plundered from God’s temple in Jerusalem. “In the same hour the fingers of

a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other" (Daniel 5:5–6).

The king called upon Daniel to interpret this saying. What had the mysterious hand written? "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 5:25–28). Then, "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old" (vv. 30–31).

Today, the handwriting is on the wall for the United States and Great Britain. The warning signs are all around us as our nations become more decadent and immoral. If we in the Western world continue to ignore, despise, and reject the Ten Commandments and the word of God, the Bible, we will face more disasters—until we finally realize that we need to seek God with our whole heart! The prophet Isaiah gives us this exhortation, encouragement, and promise: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6–7).

We must take spiritual action now! Of course, some will remain skeptical. But those who seek God through His word can have understanding and peace of mind.

A Lesson from Long Ago

We have seen that great empires rise, decline, and fall. Will the Western nations learn the lessons of history? King Belshazzar ignored the lessons from his ancestor, King Nebuchadnezzar, who had ruled over the Babylonian empire. Daniel reminded Belshazzar of the lessons he should have learned:

> O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father [ancestor] a kingdom and majesty, glory, and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and

> feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses (Daniel 5:18–21).

Nebuchadnezzar had tried to rule without acknowledging God, and he suffered terribly for it! Belshazzar, however, ignored this lesson and paid the penalty (Daniel 5:22). Must we also learn lessons the hard way, or will we pay attention to God and to His word, the Bible?

When Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that none of his advisors could reveal, Daniel not only told the king the contents of his dream, he also gave its interpretation: “You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image’s head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay” (Daniel 2:31–33).

Daniel told the king the dream’s meaning. “You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold” (vv. 37–38).

Here, God revealed that He, the Creator of the universe, was giving power and authority to the “head of gold”—Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. The dream, however, foretold the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom and the establishment of others after his: “But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others” (vv. 39–40).

Which empires did this dream describe? Reputable Bible scholars today agree on their identity. The head of gold represented the Babylonian Empire from 625 BC to

539 BC. This empire was replaced by the Medo-Persian Empire from 558 BC to 330 BC, represented by the chest and arms of silver. The belly and thighs of bronze signify the Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great from 333 BC to 31 BC. The two legs of iron indicate the Roman Empire from 31 BC to 476 AD.

A Future Revival

Finally, the ten toes on two feet of iron mixed with ceramic clay represent a future revival of the Roman Empire. The modern founders of the European Union consciously looked to the Roman Empire as a model, and even sitting U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, schooled in the classic literatures of ancient Rome and Greece, famously lauded the best of the Roman Empire in his book *The Dream of Rome*. As one reviewer put it, "The problem with the European Union, concludes Boris Johnson… is that it isn't more like the Roman Empire" ("Empire building," *The Guardian*, February 4, 2006).

Nebuchadnezzar's dream revealed that even the revived Roman Empire would be temporary. It will be replaced by what we can call a fifth Kingdom—the Kingdom of God. "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (vv. 34–35).

What is the stone that struck the image? "And in the days of these kings [symbolized by the statue's ten toes] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (v. 44).

Can a Nation Repent?

Throughout the history of the world, societies willing to turn from their evil ways have been extremely rare. Nineveh, the capital city of ancient Assyria, was one of these few—and actually delayed God's judgment. The prophet Jonah came to the citizens of Nineveh with God's warning: "And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on

sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes" (Jonah 3:4–6). Can you imagine any of today's world leaders humbling themselves before God?

The Assyrians responded to Jonah's warning. They repented of their evil ways, and God spared them. This happened in the eighth century BC. God spared Nineveh for many years, and even used the nation to punish ancient Israel and bring its people into captivity. After Assyria captured the "Northern Kingdom"—Israel—that kingdom was lost to history and its peoples became known as the "ten lost tribes."

The prophet Isaiah records God's purpose in using Assyria to punish Israel. Isaiah quotes God as saying, "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off not a few nations" (Isaiah 10:5–7).

God had warned the Kingdom of Israel to repent, but its people refused. As a result, the Assyrians conquered the ten tribes of the House of Israel and moved the captives to Assyria. Israel's final captivity took place around 721 BC.

Eventually, however, Assyria's respite from punishment proved as temporary as its spirit of repentance. History bears witness to the nation's cruelty, and in 612 BC God allowed the Medes to destroy Nineveh.

God had also sent His warnings to the Kingdom of Judah, but that nation also persisted in its sins. So, God used the kingdom of Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar to punish the House of Judah. A majority of Jews were deported to Babylon over a period of two decades, ending with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. As young men, Daniel and three of his friends were taken captive, later to be trained in the culture and literature of Babylon. Those young men persisted in the godly values they had been taught in Judah, and God was able to use Daniel to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream—and to give the good news of a coming Kingdom that will stand forever!

Will You Repent?

Even if your nation does not heed God's word, *you* will be blessed individually if

you believe and act on God’s revealed truth, which reveals the future of the nations descended from the ten lost tribes—including the U.S., Great Britain, the British-descended nations, and many of the peoples of northwest Europe. To learn more about the rise and fall of the nations descended from ancient Israel, contact the Regional Office nearest you (listed on page 4 of this magazine) to request a free copy of our informative booklet *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*. It reveals, from your Bible and history, the origins of our Western nations. Bible prophecy reveals what historians, world leaders, and political analysts do not know!

As regular readers of *Tomorrow’s World* know, much of Bible prophecy is “dual”—there is an end-time fulfillment parallel to an ancient fulfillment. Indeed, prophecy shows that the end-time descendants of Assyria will punish the end-time descendants of the Kingdom of Israel—the ten lost tribes. Will you be ready when this happens? Do you know the signs to watch for? Keep reading *Tomorrow’s World* and studying your Bible, and you will come to understand world events in the light of Bible prophecy.

Whether or not the Western nations learn the lessons of history, you and I *can* repent individually—and we *must*. The day of God’s judgment against humanity’s failed ways is quickly approaching. Those nations and individuals who turn to God will be blessed. Do not wait for your nation to change. Now is the time for *you* to seek God with all your heart!

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